THE UNVEILING AND DEDICATION

OF

A PORTRAIT OF

THE REV. ABSALOM JONES

Tuesday, February 9, 1993

12:15 p.m.

Episcopal Community Services
225 South Third Street
Woodward Room

ECS

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The Rev. Robert H. Betts, A.C.S.W.
Executive Director, ECS

DEDICATION AND UNVEILING OF PORTRAIT

The Rt. Rev. Franklin D. Turner
Suffragan Bishop, Diocese of PA
The Rev. Jesse F. Anderson, Jr.
Rector, African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas

Reading: Isaiah 61: 1-4
Prayer: Collect for Absalom Jones

Set us free, heavenly Father, from every bond of prejudice and fear; that, honoring the steadfast courage of your servant Absalom Jones, we may show forth in our lives the reconciling love and true freedom of the children of God, which you have given us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

STATEMENTS

The Rt. Rev. Franklin D. Turner
The Rev. Jesse F. Anderson, Jr.
Members of Bicentennial Commission

MUSICAL SELECTION

"Lift Every Voice and Sing"
Alisha Tee, Soloist

CLOSING PRAYERS

The Rev. Robert H. Betts

BLESSING

The Rt. Rev. Franklin D. Turner

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO STAY FOR A FESTIVE LUNCHEON

"LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING"

Lift every voice and sing till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of liberty.
Let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies;
let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us;
sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on, till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod,
felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
yet, with a steady beat, have not our weary feet
come to the place for which our parents sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered;
we have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last
where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
thou who has brought us far on the way;
thou who has by thy might led us into the light;
keep us for ever in the path, we pray. Lest our feet stray
from the places, our God, where we met thee;
lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee;
shadowed beneath thy hand may we forever stand,
true to our God, true to our native land.

James Weldon Johnson

Absalom Jones

Priest, 1818

Absalom Jones was born a house slave in 1746 in Delaware. He taught himself to read out of the New Testament, among other books. When sixteen, he was sold to a store owner in Philadelphia. There he attended a night school for Blacks, operated by Quakers. At twenty, he married another slave, and purchased her freedom with his earnings.

Jones bought his own freedom in 1784. At St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, he served as lay minister for its Black membership. The active evangelism of Jones and that of his friend, Richard Allen, greatly increased Black membership at St. George's. The alarmed vestry decided to segregate Blacks into an upstairs gallery, without notifying them. During a Sunday service when ushers attempted to remove them, the Blacks indignantly walked out in a body.

In 1787, Black Christians organized the Free African Society, the first organized Afro-American society, and Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were elected overseers. Members of the Society paid monthly dues for the benefit of those in need. The Society established communication with similar Black groups in other cities. In 1792, the Society began to build a church, which was dedicated on July 17, 1794.

The African Church applied for membership in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania on the following conditions: 1, that they be received as an organized body; 2, that they have control over their local affairs; 3, that Absalom Jones be licensed as layreader, and, if qualified, be ordained as minister. In October 1794 it was admitted as St. Thomas African Episcopal Church. Bishop White ordained Jones as deacon in 1795, and as priest on September 21, 1802.

Jones was an earnest preacher. He denounced slavery, and warned the oppressors to "clean their hands of slaves." To him, God was the Father, who always acted on "behalf of the oppressed and distressed." But it was his constant visiting and mild manner that made him beloved by his own flock and by the community. St. Thomas Church grew to over 500 members during its first year. Known as "the Black Bishop of the Episcopal Church," Jones was an example of persistent faith in God and in the Church as God's instrument.